3. Feasts and Manners

572 177 The word compere [literally: pal] is in usage in all of the islands where there are Caribs -- among the French when they trade with their Carib friends, and among the Caribs when they speak in French to those with whom they have become friends. A Frenchman gives his name to a Carib and the Carib gives his name to the Frenchman. Even if he does not give such a man his trade, at least he prefers him to others, and this does not fail to give him some profit. [320]

420 The Caribs have so few belongings that they are able to carry all of them with them, without having any desire to acquire more. 431 Thus when the Caribs have a tortoise which they want to exchange for a knife, they will not trade it if you should offer them two axes for it. The reason is that they have a need for the knife, although the axes are worth more. Our own possessions, although high-priced and scarce, would have no value among them. [291] The Caribs do not use terms for buying and selling. They ask without haggling and one gives the article to them for that which is offered without difficulty. [312]

511 The Caribs cannot fail to rank as church paupers, and to have the love of Jesus Christ, and to be accepted by the Kingdom of Heaven. For they possess neither gold nor silver and they have neither bag nor wallet, nor coat nor staff, and they do not even have the desire to obtain them. A hut to protect them from the elements satisfies their ambition. Tomali [tamale?] is their stew, and crabs are the 415 most delicate food that they have. Calabashes serve them for crockery, and baskets serve as chests. Earthen pots are used as kettles and cauldrons. When they change islands and when they go to another 574 [244] carbet, drink and food are not refused them. They reciprocate equally to others in a similar situation, provided that the others do not arrive too late, for they save nothing for the following day. [316] The Caribs ask fearlessly, and give freely, when they have something. [273]

574 576 The Caribs have their accustomed civilities. One particular man is in charge of receiving those who visit. He makes ready a hammock for them if they are important, or a stool if they are common, and has them sit. He summons a woman who carries to the guest a small wicker table which is laden with cassava and other things and it is set in front of him. Then the man in charge says, "My compere, this is for you to eat." The visitor replies with a thank you. If the cassava is unfolded

462 begin to comb and arrange his hair and paint him with urucu [body
512 paint]. This being done, they make bread for the next meal—for they make fresh bread every day. Then they cook what their husbands and children have brought from hunting and fishing. They serve it to them with cassava when it is cooked. But it is not true, as Mr. de Rochefort assumes, that the women were obliged to get venison, or had to fish [in streams] far off in the woods or at the edge of the sea.

After this they go to cultivate their gardens and plow their lands with a big pointed stick which is like a boar spear. They don't use this stick in any way like a hoe. The women also concern themselves with the planting of provisions, cultivating them, uprooting manioc, grating manioc, pressing and sifting it, and cooking cassava out of it. They also make ouicou for their social gatherings. In addition to all of this, they bear the brunt of the care and feeding of their children. Those who remain at home busy themselves by making cotton hammocks and this takes them as much time as it takes their husbands to make pirogues. They are also very busy pressing the hulls of covaheu [Breton: couáheu] and palmetto in order to get oil for the head and hair of their husbands. It is necessary to observe that it would be unthinkable for a man to be seen aiding his wife in any way.

[278] The obligations which the women have in caring for the sick and binding the wounded have given them a marvelous knowledge of herbs, which they use to treat a large number of ailments.

5. Commerce

● 437 No kind of trade exists among the Caribs, neither buying nor selling, for they give each other very liberally all the things with which they can aid their fellowmen, provided they do not inconvenience themselves too much. No nation has ever been more in need of the manufactures which industry has made common in all the nations of Europe. Before European contact, when the Caribs
439 wished to cut down trees to make a house, they had nothing to use but stone axes. If they wished to fish they could use only hooks of caret turtle shell. If they planned to build a pirogue in order to go to war against their foes, they endured all the trouble imaginable

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157 "shy." Originally it was the name for a kind of crab which, when it cannot escape unobserved, will curl up and remain perfectly still, so that by no amount of scrutiny or poking can it be made to show the least sign of life) undoubtedly has been one of the principal causes for the bolder, more hot-blooded negro's relatively greater success as a lover, and for the increasing proportion of mixed blood in the reserve today. It has, moreover, contributed to the decay and disappearance of language, legend, and custom; and renders doubly difficult today the task of eking out such vestiges of these as still remain.

578 The war feuds of other days have been replaced by a multitude of
[757] petty jealousies and hatreds, but the Caribs still resort to sorcery and piai as instruments of injury and revenge. Though, or perhaps just because, the boutou (war club) of yore has gone forever, that other no less formidable weapon, the tongues of the womenfolk, rages more mercilessly than before. In vain one looks among his present-day descendants for that fierceness which is said to have characterized the Carib of old, earning for him a symbolic association with the Malfini, or Mansfénix hawk.

481 Much has been made of the Indian's custom of walking in single or Indian file, and this is as true today in Dominica as ever or elsewhere; but it seems to be the natural outcome of a habit acquired of necessity on forest trails rather than a racial tradition. More significant, perhaps, is the Indian's peculiarly emphatic, stumpy, forward-falling gait, which, in a manner, is reproduced in his speech, character, and way of life.

484 The Caribs' love of travel, in an island where nine-tenths of the population never move without good reason outside a radius of half a mile from their homes, is perhaps worth mention. Few are the men of the reserve who have not at one time or another visited one or all of the neighboring islands of Guadeloupe, Marie Galante, Martinique—and that with the prospect of no more than a wine or rum debauch if lucky, and a term of imprisonment if caught. Others have left the country for Guiana, Bolivia, or Cuba, as opportunity offered, in search of adventure rather than fortune. Men, women, even children, think nothing of a 35-mile tramp, over mountain track and through virgin forest, to Roseau, the capital, for the sole purpose of selling a few baskets or of buying a few yards of sail cloth or a pound of nails. Their business concluded and their money spent, they will take the homeward road immediately and, if only there be a moon to guide them, march all night through to arrive home by daybreak.

437 Whether cause or effect of poverty, I do not know, but the Indian's
181 proverbial ignorance of the value of money remains as much a fact as his general indifference. In Dominica, at least, he has no other

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scale of worth than his present want—I do not say need, advisedly. I have seen a girl starve her baby in order to procure it a baptismal robe it would use only once. When he has made up his mind to buy or sell, the worst bargain in the world will not deter the Carib, nor persuade him to await a better opportunity. On the other hand, he will let you vainly wait months for a basket or some other article you have ordered from him, and appear dissatisfied, if and when he finally condescends to bring it, with the price originally set by himself.

For a number of reasons I have not been able to push my inquiries into Carib life and lore—and especially with regard to the archeological material, which I believe to be plentiful—as far as I should have wished. Perhaps the same petty jealousies of which I have spoken prevented some members of the tribe from communicating to me—or at least prompted them to demand exorbitant sums for their only possibly valuable information—all that they knew of their nation's language and legend. Less excusable is the crass ignorance of many Creoles, white and colored alike, in a position to know better, as to the nature and aims of ethnological research. The ridicule and suspicions of such individuals in a pseudo-civilized community inevitably render the student's task all the harder. On the other hand, I am profoundly grateful to those others with whom I have come in contact, of whatever color or race, for their sincere collaboration and loyal friendship.

Social and Sexual

Social organization, in as far as it can be said to exist at all, is extremely slack among the Caribs today, and appears to have been so always. Previously there were two chiefs in Dominica: One for the windward side, another for the leeward side of the island, but their authority was never more than of an advisory or paternal nature, even where it was combined with that of magnétiseur or sorcerer. Even the punishment of crimes committed within the tribe was left to the individuals or family concerned. The chiefs, though often of the same family, seem to have been chosen by common consent for some recognized superiority or sagacity (ordeals of pain or hunger endurance were common) rather than by hereditary privilege. In war time, on the contrary, supreme authority was given to another commander, or war chief, who usually led the combined armies of Dominica and Guadeloupe. Today, in spite of certain local prejudices and jealousies, the only social unit which can be said to subsist is the family.

No puberty ceremonies have survived. Nevertheless, girls and women maintain a certain seclusion at their menstrual periods, especially the first, and do not leave the house, even to bathe in the river or for their personal necessities. Were they to do so, it is said